

NSC BRIEFING

18 July 1956

NEAR EAST DEVELOPMENTS

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2. On 11 July, Egypt announced that Col. Mustafa Hafez, chief of the "Palestine Liberation Army," had been killed in the Gaza Strip by a "mine explosion".

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B. On 13 July, Egypt's Middle East News Agency reversed its original announcement and declared that Hafez had been killed by a bomb sent through the mail, but provided no other details.

3. On 14 July, Col. Salah Mustafa, the Egyptian military attache in Jordan, was also critically injured by a mail-bomb. In the Jordanian instance, the bomb was contained in a registered parcel addressed to Col. Mustafa from Jerusalem, and allegedly bearing as a return address the "Joint Armistice Commission."

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5. Meanwhile a contest for control is shaping up between anti-leftist and leftist elements in Syria. It is also a contest between Iraq and Egypt. Civilian and military groups, inside and outside Syria, are engaged in plotting coups or countercoups. The situation remains highly fluid.

A. General Adib Shishakli, former military dictator of Syria (1950-54), landed in Lebanon on 26 June to prepare a coup in Syria. The coup was originally scheduled for 16 July but now Shishakli reportedly plans to move about 24-25 July. Shishakli has at least the indirect support of Iraq and probably the approval of Turkey and [REDACTED]

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B. Iraq has long been concerned with the strong anti-Western pro-Egyptian trend in Syria and with the rise of leftist influence. It has repeatedly sought a "green light" from the West to establish a government in Syria favorable to the West, Iraq and the Baghdad Pact.

C. Iraq has reportedly advanced funds to Shishakli. It has also established an advance base at Rutba near the Syrian-Jordanian border. Iraq maintains this new base is the result of a recent military agreement with Jordan, but it is more likely that Iraq is using the agreement as cover in order to be ready to move in the event of unfavorable political developments in either Syria or Jordan.

(1) Despite these moves Iraqi and other observers have strong doubts that Shishakli has either a sound plan for a coup or is able to gather sufficient support in Syria to take over successfully. Moreover, Shishakli's plans have at least temporarily been overtaken by an antileftist action within Syria.

6. On 7 July an antileftist group of senior army officers working with conservative cabinet ministers and a faction split off from the once dominant junior officer group, forced the resignation of Chief of Staff Shaghat Shuqayr. This reportedly is the initial step in the move to purge the army and civilian life of leftist influence.

A. No new moves have been undertaken. The antileftist army group has assumed the top staff positions but is apparently moving with caution. The next target is Colonel Sarraj, Syrian G-2, and top leader of the junior officer group.

B. After Sarraj, the group plans to move against army elements supporting the leftist, pro-Egyptian Arab Socialist Resurrection Party and the Communist Party. There has also been the suggestion that the new group planned to seek the recall of the Egyptian military attache and the Egyptian ambassador apparently to break the lines of communication between Egypt and the Arab Socialists.

7. The critical test in the struggle between right and left is yet to come. The antileftists have established only nominal control. The removal of Shuqayr was relatively easy because he had no personal following in either the army or among the politicians.

A. This is not the case with the leftists. Leftist and Communist officer influence is strong in the Syrian army and many of them are in important command positions. The left also controls the "street" and is capable of demonstrations and riots.

B. Unless carefully planned, a concerted move against the left will set off a strong leftist counteraction, probably with Egyptian and Saudi Arabian support. There is in fact some evidence now that the left is planning counteraction.

C. The leftist press has been shouting about "another Zahedi behind the lines," and leftist leaders have made charges of "foreign instigation" of the removal of Shuqayr and state that they will strongly oppose any moves to bring Syria "into the camp of imperialism."

8. Although the new, more conservative group now in nominal control of the Syrian Army is believed to be seeking to diminish the domestic influence of leftist, pro-Egyptian elements, it almost certainly does not wish to break off Syria's military alliance with Egypt against Israel. Syrian army leaders, regardless of their <sup>political</sup> practical orientation, probably will continue to work with Egypt in trying to strengthen ties among Israel's immediate neighbors and to view with suspicion the development of ties with Iraq which they feel might in a crisis exercise a restraining influence on Arab actions.